

Message Text

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SUBJ : ZIONISM, RACISM, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL DILEMMA IN MEXICAN
FOREIGN POLICY

REF : MEXICO 11095

SUMMARY. MEXICO'S SOMERSAULTING POSTURE ON ZIONISM MAY
HAVE HELPED PLACATE SOME CRITICS, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD,
AND THUS FEND OFF SERIOUS DAMAGE TO ITS TOURISM INDUSTRY.
BUT IT RAISED MORE QUESTIONS THAN IT ANSWERED ABOUT HOW
GOM FOREIGN POLICY IS MADE, AND IT REVEALED IN STARK TERMS
THE FUNDAMENTAL DILEMMA FACING MEXICAN POLICYMAKERS: HOW
TO BLANCE THIRD WORLD ASPIRATIONS AGAINST THE HARSH FACTS
OF MEXICO'S "DEPENDENCY," ITS INTENSE EVERDAY INVOLVEMENT
WITH THE DEVELOPED WORLD. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT HAS ALL BUT EATEN CROW OVER
ITS VOTE IN THE UNGA SIX WEEKS AGO IN FAVOR OF THE "ZIONISM
IS RACISM" RESOLUTION. NOW THAT FONSEC RABASA HAS VIRTUALLY
BEGGED FORIVENESS OF THE ISRAELIS IN TEL AVIV,
ECHEVERRIA HAS ASSURED VISITING JEWISH LEADERS HERE
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THAT MEXICO'S VOTE WAS "MISUNDERSTOOD", AND MEXICO HAS

FORMALLY DISASSOCIATED ITSELF FROM THE RACISM ARGUMENT THROUGH A SUBSEQUENT "EXPLANATION" OF ITS UNGA VOTE, THE GOM PROBABLY CONSIDERS THAT SUFFICIENT AMENDS HAVE BEEN MADE AND ITS SLATE IS AGAIN CLEAN. BUT IT WILL PROBABLY DISCOVER THAT THE MATTER IS NOT SO SIMPLE.

2. IN FACT, THE ZIONISM ISSUE IS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF THE BASIC FOREIGN POLICY DILEMMA FACING THE GOM TODAY: HOW TO RECONCILE ITS THIRD WORLD ASPIRATIONS WITH WHAT THE THEORISTS CALL "DEPENDENCY". TRADITIONALLY PRO-ISRAEL, MEXICO WAS ORIGINALLY DRAWN INTO THE ZIONISM ISSUE WHILE HOSTING THE IWY CONFERENCE LAST JUNE/JULY, WHEN IT FELT COMPELLED TO ALIGN WITH ITS THIRD WOLD GUESTS (INCLUDING ESPECIALLY THE OPEC NATIONS) IN EXCHANGE FOR FLATTERING REFERENCES TO CERDS IN THE CONFERENCE'S "STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES". IT WAS FURTHER DRAWN IN DURING ECHEVERRIA'S PEREGRINATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST DURING AUGUST, WHEN THE PRESIDENT NAIVELY THOUGHT HE MIGHT PULL OFF A DIPLOMATIC COUP (AND ENHANCE HIS CHANCES TO BECOME UN SECGEN) BY SETTLEING THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE THROUGH FACE-TO-FACE TALKS BETWEEN ISRAELI AND EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES.

3. APPARENTLY, ECHEVERRIA VIEWED THE UNGA VOTE AGAINST ZIONISM AS ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH HIS OWN NOTIONS OF A SUITABLE MIDEAST SETTLEMENT AND WITH THE LARGER THRUST OF MEXICO'S THIRD WORLD DIPLOMACY: BY DEMONSTRATING MEXICAN INDIEPENDENCE OF GREAT POWER PRESSURE, HE COULD REINFORCE HISTHIRD WORLD CREDENTIALS ANDTHUS OPEN THE WAY FOR AN "IMPARTIAL" MEXICAN ROLE IN DEALING WITH BOTH ARABS AND ISRAELIS.

4. IF THIS WAS ECHEVERRIA'S NOTION (AND WE ARE NOT SURE), IT CLEARLY BACKFIRED -- LARGELY BECAUSE IT FAILED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE HARD FACT OF MEXICO'S VERY REAL "DEPENDENCE" UPON THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES. NOT UPON THE US GOVERNMENT: OUR EFFORTS TO DISSUADE MEXICO WERE IN FACT COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE AND ONLY PUSHED ECHEVERRIA FURTHER INTO THE THICKET. BUT RATHER UPON ITS OWN MANY-FACITED, MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR, EVERYDAY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE DEVELOPED WORLD -- AND SPECIFICALLY UPON TOURIST AND DEVELOPMENT DOLLARS, WHICH WERE FINALLY WHAT MADE MEXICO FEEL THE PINCH. FACED WITH LOSING UP TO 70 PERCENT OF THIS COUNTRY'S MOST AFFLUENT WINTER TOURISTS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND WITH AN INCIPIENT BOYCOTT OF MEXICAN GOODS IN THE U.S., MEXICAN BUSINESSMEN PUT UP A HOWL THAT ECHEVERRIA HAD TO LISTEN TO.

5. NOR WERE THE BUSINESSMEN ALONE: INDEPENDENT PUBLIC OPINION, WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT SHARE ECHEVERRIA'S THIRD WORLD THRUST, WAS GENERALLY OUTRAGED WITH A MANEUVER WHICH SEEMED TO LINK MEXICO WITH ANTI-SEMITISM AND BESMIRCH MEXICO'S RECORD OF SYMPATHY TOWARD ISRAEL. IT WAS ONE

THING TO BE INDEPENDENT OF THE U.S. AND TO FAVOR AN EQUITABLE SOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. IT WAS QUITE ANOTHER TO SEEM TO PREJUDGE THE CASE AGAINST ISRAEL IN FAVOR OF SHORT-TERM GAINS WITH THE ARABS.

6. BY MAKING APOLOGIES ALL AROUND AND "EXPLAINING" MEXICO'S VOTE IN THE UNGA, ECHEVERRIA ACTED TO SALVAGE THE VITAL TOURISM INDUSTRY AND PLACATE THE TRADITIONALISTS. BUT NOW HE FACES A STORM OF CRITICISM OF A MORE FUNDAMENTAL SORT, FROM THOSE WHO FEEL HE HAS Demeaned Mexico's international image by getting himself into a position where he had to eat humble pie. AMONG THE QUESTIONS NOW BEING ASKED:

-- WHO DESIGNS MEXICAN FOREIGN POLICY, THE PRESIDENT OR THE FONSEC? CLEARLY, THE ANSWER IS THE FORMER. BUSY AS HE IS, ECHEVERRIA CALLS THE MAJOR SHOTS, VERY OFTEN SHOOTING FROM THE HIP WITH LITTLE OR NO COUNSEL FROM HIS FONSEC ADVISORS. POOR SECRETARY RABASA IS THEN ASSIGNED THE HUMILIATING TASK OF PICKING UP THE PIECES AND BEARING THE BRUNT OF PUBLIC CRITICISM WHEN THINGS GO WRONG.

-- WHAT ARE MEXICO'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS? REDUCED DEPENDENCE ON THE U.S. AND CLOSER COOPERATIVE TIES WITH THE THIRD WORLD, OBVIOUSLY. BUT AS THIS INCIDENT SHOWED, ECHEVERRIA'S GRAND DESIGN DOESN'T ALWAYS COINCIDE WITH THE FACTS OF LIFE, AND UNPALATABLE AS THEY MAY BE, THE EXIGENCIES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT MUST TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER PROUD THEORIES.

-- WHAT ARE THE BASIC INFLUENCES SHAPING MEXICAN POLICY? REPUGNANT THOUGH THEY MAY BE TO MANY MEXICANS, THOSE WHO CONTROL DEVELOPMENT DOLLARS IN THE END WEIGH MORE HEAVILY ON POLICY-MAKING THAN IDEOLOGICAL TIES OF IDENTITY WITH THIRD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WORLD BRETHREN, EVEN THOSE WHO SEEM TO HOLD OUT PROMISE OF EVENTUAL PETRODOLLARS. IN THE END, IT WAS EX-PRESIDENT ALEMAN, DESPISED PLUTOCRATIC ENEMY OF THE MEXICAN LEFT, ON WHOM ECHEVERRIA HAD TO CALL TO BRING ABOUT HIS MEETING OF RECONCILIATION WITH AMERICAN JEWS AND COUNTER THE IMPENDING BUSINESSMEN'S BOYCOTT.

-- HOW ACCURATELY DOES ECHEVERRIA REFLECT MEXICO? HERE IS PERHAPS THE TOUCHIEST QUESTION OF ALL FOR THE PRESIDENT. THE ZIONISM ISSUE REVEALED THE clearest split in years BETWEEN GOM-CONTROLLED AND INDEPENDENT PUBLIC OPINION, WITH THE FORMER TYING ITSELF IN KNOTS ATTEMPTING TO EXPLAIN EACH TURN IN POLICY AND THE LATTER UNLOOSING EXTRAORDINARILY FIERCE AND CAUSTIC CRITICISM OF ITS CONTRADICTIONS. MOST

TELLING OF ALL, PERHAPS, IS THE CHARGE THAT AT NO TIME HAS ECHEVERRIA HIMSELF LEVELED WITH THE MEXICAN PUBLIC (HE HAS TAKEN TO TASK MOST SHARPLY FOR HAVING REVEALED HIS "EXPLANATION OF VOTE" VIA SPOKESMEN FOR HIS VISITING JEWISH GUESTS). MEXICO AT LARGE SHARES TO SOME EXTENT IN ECHEVERRIA'S OWN DEPENDENCY DILEMMA, AND NO CONCEIVABLE POSTURE COULD HAVE PLESED EVERYONE. BUT THERE IS GOWING RESENTMENT AT ECHEVERRIA'S ONE-MAN FOREIGN POLICY SHOW AND HIS ARCH RELUCTANCE TO TAKE THE PUBLIC INTO HIS CONFIDENCE BEFORE POLICIES ARE SET IN CONCRETE.

7. THUS ECHEVERRIA IS NOT OUT OF THE WOODS ON ZIONISM (NOT EVEN WITH THE ISRAELIS, AS TEL AVIV'S 7981 SHOWS), AND IN FACT HIS DESPERATE TWISTS AND TURNS HAVE BROUGHT INTO THE OPEN MANY DEEPER QUESTIONS ABOUT GOM FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING. THE QUESTIONS WILL PERIST AFTER HE LEAVES OFFICE A YEAR FROM NOW AND HIS SUCCESSOR TAKES UP THE EFFORT TO BALANCE AN IDEOLOGICAL INDENTITY AGAINST A DE FACTO DEPENDENCY -- THE TIGHTROPE WHICH MODERN MEXICO IS APPARENTLY CONDEMNED TO WALK.
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